BLACK, Norman F. : Collegiate Institute, Regina, July, November 1918

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P. McARA, CHAIRMAN

FENTON MUNRO, SEC.-TREAS.
2076 McINTYRE STREET

REGINA,
SASKATCHEWAN

July 5. 1918.

Dear President Falconer:

I am in receipt of a long and interesting letter from A. Cyril March, B.A., a former western teacher, who intermitted his legal studies to go on active service very early in the war. He subsequently was taken prisoner by the Germans and, as I infer, when they had succeeded in shattering his health to a sufficient extent he was transferred for internment to Switzerland, where he now is prosecuting his studies at Geneva University.

March is a young man of exceptional inteligence and generous ideals. He is a very respectable linguist and during my inspectoral experience he deliberately devoted himself to educational work in non-English immigrant communities. While in Germany he has been seriously studying the Russian language, and has been brought into intimate association with a large number of young Russians of good type. There are also very many such among his companions in Switzerland. Indeed he says that the Russian students constitute the most numerous body in the cosmopolitan assembly which the war has gathered at that seat of learning. They are to be found in all classes, but particularly in medical and scientific courses.

March feels very deeply the pathos and tragedy of Russia's present situation, and is possessed of a passionate conviction that the interests of all concerned require that the democratic nations of the world show in a practical fashion their sympathy with that troubled country. If we fail to meet the situation he sees a most disturbing prospect of the Germanization of Russia with all that that means for the future unlimited development of militarism.

He is much impressed with the heroism of his Russian fellow students and sees in them, perhaps, the most hopeful element making for the salvation of their fatherland and consequently for

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freedom throughout the world. There are some two thousand of these exiles now studying in Switzerland, the larger proportion being women and girls. They are in desperate poverty. Some of them manage to find a little remunerative work and they help the others, but they are ill-clad, ill-fed, and ill-housed. They get some help from the Swiss people, but their lot is very very hard. "One was found dead in his room not long ago", says March: "just starved to death, that's all." As prisoners in Germany their lot was by far the hardest. Half of their number died during captivity and practically all the rest are tubercular. They appraciated with pathetic intensity the kindness of Canadian fellow prisoners who shared with them an occasional parcel of food from Canada.

Now March wonders whether it might not be possible to arrange for some of these students to study under more favorable conditions over here in Canada before returning to supply the needed intelectual leadership in their own country. He thinks that arrangements might be made to accommodate fust a few of them at all events at each of our more important universities. Some of them, he says, would at first have the language difficulty; their work is carried on in French in Switzerland; but most of them can read English and only lack practice. He remarks that Russians learn all languages very quickly, and that other languages in comparison to their own are pastimes. Let me quote a paragraph:

"It would be a wonderful act if we could take a few of them over there; give them a little bit of the best of Canada to weave into their structure of the future. The development of a large part of their own country will be very similar to the development of our own west. They could find with us something that they would not find elsewhere. The older countries of Europe can offer no parallel."

I have written in reply to Mr. March a letter from which I enclose a copy of the essential

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portions. I wish that you would give this letter the consideration that it deserves, and favor me with your opinions.

I may add that I have laid Mr. March's proposals before President Murray of Saskatoon, and I enclose herewith also a copy of his reply.

With kind regards, I am,

Faithfully yours,

Norman F. Black

Sir Robert Falconer, LL.D.,
President of Toronto University,
Toronto, Ont.

NFB/MJ.

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July 4, 1918.

Dear Dr. Black.

Your letter of the 3rd arrived this morning. I have read it and the letter to March with great interest.

I think your suggestion is a wise and a good one, and I do not think it would be very difficult to provide for a number of Russians at certain Universities in Canada. I would suggest that men who wish to take up Agriculture, or Law, or Medicine, or Teaching, or possibly Dentistry, should come. The large Russian population of Western Canada and of the cities of the east, where the Jews principally congregate, would justify the preparation of certain men for some professional work among them.

We have had at the University five or six Russian students, one in Law, two in Agriculture, and the rest in Arts. These are in addition to the Ukrainians. The Russian aptitude for languages makes these men peculiarly useful in this western country. We could use a couple of good Russians now for Extension Work in Agriculture after they had the necessary training. I would be prepared to assure the students who came here free tuition and sufficient employment in the summer time to enable them to meet expenses; in fact the Russian students who are here now have, with one or two exceptions met their own expenses. A student in Law might enter an office as clerk, and after a year's probation get a small salary. Those who teach and those who go into Agriculture can get employment in the summer; students of Agriculture can get employment in the summer very easily. The Medical students would find the task more difficult, because of the high fees and long sessions, but even they could meet the greater part of their expenses. Dental students could enter a period of apprenticeship until they got a certain amount of money saved.

I doubt whether it would be possible for us to start a fund for such persons. I think such aid would have to be given by Governments. The scale is too large and the purpose is too remote for a popular appeal and voluntary fund.

Sincerely yours,

Sgd. Walter C. Murray.

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July 3, 1918.

My dear March:

Your long and interesting letter dated May 31st reached me last week. It has already been and will continue to be the subject of much serious reflection.

... ...

I sympathize deeply with you in your interest in your Russian fellow students. You and I have had much in common in our attitude towards non-English speaking people here at home, and I assure you that the problem involved in their wise treatment is very much more difficult and complex here now than it was before the outbreak of the war. Indeed, it has become a problem so far reaching in its significance as in my mind to dwarf in interest almost anything else. The immediate duty of the hour is of course to smash German militarism by force of arms; but the war will not really be over, as far as Saskatchewan is concerned, till a quarter of a million alien enemies have been transformed into real friends and fellow citizens, conquered by sympathy, generosity, and common sense.

No body knows less about the general configuration of the prairie than do the gophers living on it. It is very difficult indeed to see in their true perspective the problems and policies with which one is most immediately concerned. As you say the changes of recent years have enlarged our vision so that we are less parochially minded than we used to be. Perhaps it is important that we should remind ourselves that the best cosmopolitanism consists in doing ones neighborly duty to the people just round the corner.

Of course I have very limited means of securing reliable information regarding the Russian situation, but in so far as I have been able to see, the present Russian situation is the result of causes for which the Russian people themselves can scarcely be held responsible. I have not forgotten that in the early days of the war the Russians were about the only people on our side who could claim to be fighting a winning battle, and I hope to God that they and their friends may find for them a way of escape from their

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present weltering chaos, and from the imminent danger of strangulation by Germany. I think that this is the general attitude of the people in this country.

Now as to the Russian students, they are a class of people that should command the admiration and sympathy of the world even if they make us nervous and inclined to look askance under the sideboard for a possible bomb shell. Your sugrestion that a few of these heroic Russian pioneers be enabled to find a home in each of our larger universities in Canada is very interesting. I have no doubt that if the scheme proves feasible its results would be most far reaching. An obstacle that would have to be overcome is a deep rooted though semi-inarticulate conviction that Bolsheviki-ism is not a disease capable of attacking only Russians, but that the Russians may, without any criminal intent, so infect the rest of the world as to involve it in a disasterous epidemic.

Truth to tell, I do not yet see clearly a way out of the difficulty. I can promise you, however, that I shall give it very serious thought, and will communicate with university friends in different centres, explaining your suggestion and asking for their advice and co-operation.

To what extent would it be necessary for these visitors to be financed by their hosts? What can you tell me regarding the age of the young men and women most likely to come? What about their morals? What about their political tendencies? How long would they be likely to stay here? What courses would they most require? Would they be in a position to enter at once in the universities or would preliminary high school courses be necessary in any large proportion of cases? These are some of the questions that I should be glad to have you discuss in your next letter.

With kindest regards and all good wishes, I am,

Faithfully yours,

July 13th, 1918

Principal Norman F. Black,

The Collegiate Institute,

Regina, Sask.

Dear Sir:

In the absence of President Falconer I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 5th inst. enclosing copy of a letter from President Murray regarding The Russian students in Canadian Universities. The President will not return to the office until October, when the letter will be brought to his attention.

Yours very truly,

President's Secretary.

November 19th, 1918

Principal M. F. Flack,

Collegiate Institute, Regina.

Dear Principal Flack:

I should have answered your letter of July 5 some weeks ago, but since my return from overseas I have been so busy I have not had time to do so.

While one has every sympathy with the proposal of Mr. March and has every desire to help the Russians I feel that his proposal is full of difficulties. There have been so many revolutionary elements among the Intelligentia of Russia that we should have to be very careful before offering any special facilities to Russian students to come to Toronto. Also, what we could do for Russian women students I am hardly able to say. Already we are less fully staffed for our own women students than we should be, and it would not do to invite others here from Russia unless we could pay them some attention. I should be glad, however, to hear from you if you have any further practical proposal to make.

Yours sincerely,

President.